

## **DISTILLING A 'NEW REGIONALIST' PLANNING AGENDA FOR SOUTH AFRICA: IS THE PROVINCIAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (PGDS) MEASURING UP?**

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### **Abstract**

There is a renaissance of regions in the economic geography of globalisation. Sub-national regions and supra-national regions have become increasingly important and regions have become the critical foundations of development processes. National economic vitality depends to a large extent on maximising the growth potential of economic regions and their ability to compete nationally and internationally. Numerous authors highlight the region as the new economic space that can promote strategic planning and economic development in a post-modernist era ((Deas and Ward, 2000; Vigar *et al.*, 2000; Keating, 1998). The region becomes the nexus for 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' planning processes and strategic regional-scale planning is increasingly being seen as key in achieving sustainable growth and development. In South Africa too, there is now a growing recognition of the importance of this 'new regionalist' planning agenda and the value it can add to creating an effective inter-governmental planning system. It is particularly useful when focusing on the role of provincial planning, often considered to be the weak link within the inter-governmental planning system in South Africa.

The aim of this paper is to: 1) Distil and explore salient features of regional planning from the literature on the new regionalist planning agenda. 2) Review recent development in the South African policy context around provincial planning and assess the extent to which it reflects the constructs of this planning agenda. This review will *inter alia* include the Constitutional precepts on provincial government, Provincial Growth and Development Strategy Guidelines, Harmonisation and Alignment proposals, Demarcation policies and processes, and Cabinet Declarations. 3) Reflect on recent assessments of Provincial Growth and Development Strategies conducted by the authors and highlight any evidence, or lack thereof, of new regionalist features or approaches. 4) Draw conclusions regarding the future role of regional planning in South Africa in view of the current policy review process on the system of provincial and local government being undertaken by the Department of Provincial and Local Government (dplg) and the implications for the notions of and discourses on a) areas of shared impact; b) functional regions; and c) the potential role of development planning agencies for regional planning in South Africa.

### **Keywords**

'New regionalism', regional planning, region/s, Provincial Growth and Development Strategies, Sustainability Science

## Introduction

In the context of the resurgence of the region as well as regional-scale planning in the developed countries of the West (see Alden, 2006; Healey, 2000, 2004; Vigar *et al.*, 2000; Storper, 1995) planners and policy-makers world-over are compelled to critically examine processes shaping their own spaces, territories and actions. In the economic geography of globalisation, sub-national and supra-national regions are viewed as the critical foundations of development processes. It is argued that the vitality of national economies depends to a large extent on maximising the growth potential of economic regions and their ability to compete nationally and internationally. Numerous authors highlight the region as the new economic space that can promote strategic planning and economic development in a post-modernist era (Deas and Ward, 2000; Vigar *et al.*, 2000; Keating, 1998). The region becomes the nexus for 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' planning processes and strategic regional-scale planning is increasingly being seen as key in achieving sustainable growth and development.

In South Africa too, there is now a growing recognition of the importance of the 'regional development paradigm' and the related planning agenda, and the value it can add to creating an effective intergovernmental planning system. It is particularly useful when reviewing the role of provincial planning, often considered to be the weak link within the intergovernmental planning system in South Africa. The regional development paradigm is punted as a possible leverage point in placing South Africa on its desired development trajectory.

This paper attempts to track traces of 'New Regionalist' thinking in the evolution of the nine Provincial Growth and Development Strategies (PGDSs).

As a way of setting the scene, the first section of the paper briefly describes the quest for shared and sustainable growth and development in South Africa. The second section provides a brief overview of relevant aspects of the literature on 'new regionalism' and its implications for regional scale (sub-national strategic planning) and attempt to deduce the salient features of a good regional strategic plan from this body of literature. The third part of the paper describes the place of PGDSs within the South African intergovernmental planning system and reflects on the extent to which policy and guidelines pertaining to PGDSs reflect elements of 'new regionalist' thinking. Using the findings from empirical research conducted by the authors (for the Presidency) the *last* section provides a synopsis of the current status of the PGDSs and reflects on the extent to which they are drawing on thinking in 'new regionalism' to distil a 'new regionalist' planning agenda for South Africa.

## Regional development and the quest for sustainable and shared growth and development

South Africa, being one of the most influential polities of the African Continent, and the global South, finds itself faced with the mammoth task of redressing the socio-economic and spatial distortions brought about by the development policies and practices of South Africa's past. During a media briefing by the Deputy President Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka on 6 February 2006, the South African Government's 'Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative' (ASGISA) was introduced. The core objective of ASGISA is to halve poverty and unemployment by 2014. In order to achieve this, it is imperative that an average annual economic growth rate of 5% is achieved between 2004 and 2014. When realistically assessing the capabilities and deficiencies of the economy and the international environment, a 4.5% annual GDP growth rate between 2005 and 2009 and an average growth rate of at least 6% of GDP between 2010 and 2014 will be required to achieve the overall target.

Various observers have lauded South Africa's development journey since 1994 as impressive. In their article titled *The World and South Africa in the 2010s*, Ilbury and Sunter (2008) argue that South Africa vaulted into the 'Premier League' of nations when it became a full-blown democracy in 1994. "It has remained there as a result of 14 years of stable government and disciplined macroeconomic policies, all of which took place in the context of the global 'Long Boom' scenario". Moreover, the South African State is expected to translate economic growth into service delivery and job creation which results in tangible and sustained improvements in the quality of life of all its citizens.

Whether South Africa can maintain the necessary momentum along its ambitious development trajectory is, however, questioned in the light of its deteriorating performance on a number of international indices in recent times. From 2006 onwards, a decline in the general performance of South Africa on the economic front is evident across a number of fronts. South Africa fell from 36<sup>th</sup> position in 2006 to 44<sup>th</sup> position in 2007 on The World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global Competitive Index. South Africa's ranking deteriorated from the 29<sup>th</sup> position to 35<sup>th</sup> in the World Bank's Doing Business in 2008 Survey. South Africa also descended 12 places in *The International Institute for Management Development's World Competitiveness Yearbook for 2007* and slipped from 38<sup>th</sup> to 50<sup>th</sup> position in a ranking of 55 countries. According to Ilbury and Sunter (2008) "the reality is that other countries have now stepped up to the plate in the global game, accepted the conditions and challenges, and are outperforming South Africa".

In relation to achieving the core objectives of the developmental state, Robinson (2008) remarks that while the South African economy is growing at higher levels than 10 years ago, it is slow to share the benefits of growth resulting in perpetuating and even strengthening a bifurcating development trajectory.

Whilst the unfolding picture for South Africa is fraught with challenges, it is not alone in its quest for sustainable growth and development. Storper (1998) suggests that while a few countries have succeeded in rapid economic growth in terms of narrowing the gap between themselves and the more advanced countries and bringing their citizens out of poverty, many more countries have seen that gap grow and the poverty increase.

According to Ban K-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations, the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals "have become a universal framework for development and a means for developing countries and their development partners to work together in pursuit of a shared future for all". The MGD report released in 2007 suggests that results are mixed and despite clear successes in a few places, a lot remains to be done. It is clear that for various countries doing business as usual will not be sufficient to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

According to Macleod (2008) a growing appreciation of the long term success stories of high performing regions such as Emilia-Romagna in Italy, Baden-Württemberg in Germany, Catalonia in Spain, Jutland in Denmark and Silicon Valley in the USA in fostering their own economic and social success have focused the eyes of the world on the regional development paradigm as a possible panacea for a range of growth and development challenges, such as poverty and unemployment.

Stiglitz (1998) argues for a new development paradigm, which incorporates the fundamental transformation of all aspects of society and punts the need for development strategies which: 1) result in increases in the GDP per capita; 2) significant improvements in living standards; 3) systematically works towards the elimination of poverty; 4) are sustainable and robust; 5) embedded in an ever-changing global environment; and 6) set in the context of developments within their region.

Scott and Storper (2003) develop this argument by making the case that regional economies are “synergy-laden systems of physical and relational assets, and intensifying globalisation is making this situation more and not less the case”. As such, regions are an essential dimension of the development process, not just in the more advanced countries but also in less-developed parts of the world. They argue that the theory of development must incorporate the role of regions as active and causal elements in the economic growth process.

## **New regionalism and regional planning**

This section of the paper explores relevant aspects of the body of literature on ‘new regionalism’ and its implications for regional scale (sub-national) strategic planning in order to deduce the salient features of a good regional strategic plan.

### **Defining the elusive ‘region’ and regional planning**

The definitions of the concepts ‘region’ and ‘regional planning’ remain a bone of contention amongst economic geographers, political scientists and planners (see Wannop, 1995; Nir, 1990; Martins, 1986; Boshoff, 1989 among others). For clarity purposes, a ‘region’ in this paper refers to the space/s governed by the provincial sphere of government in South Africa, that is, the level below the nation-state and above the local authority. Various authors view the region as a significant and useful unit of analysis for planning (c.f. Alden, 2006; Haughton and Counsell, 2004). Given its strategic positioning within a globalised context, the region has been canonised as a critical space for distilling supra-national and local socio-economic and environmental processes (Jones and MacLeod, 1999; MacLeod, 1998; Storper, 1995).

Authors such as Haughton and Counsel (2004: 138) regard regional planning as an essential part of the ‘new regional institutional landscape’. Regional planning is not new to most developed countries (Kuklinski, 1970; Lichfield, 1966) and the current wave of regional planning seems to have caught the attention of many scholars (Alden, 2006; Healey, 2004, 2000; Tewdwr-Jones, 2002; Vigar *et al.*, 2000). Healy defines (2000, 2004) regional planning as the “deliberate, strategic, forward-looking, dynamic and progressive action(s) whose impact permeates across all economic, spatial, social and ecological levels of a given polity” (emphasis added). In assimilating much of current thinking on the subject matter, the authors define regional planning as a *strategic action whose significance resides in its deliberate effort to harness competitive and comparative advantages through the utilisation and employment of intra/inter-regional processes.*

### **Salient features of sound regional strategic plans**

‘New regionalism’ has a strong economic focus, it emerges mainly from so-called ‘geographical’ economists and economic geographers, what Perrons (2001) called New Economic Geographers I & II. The focus in this work tends to be on spatial agglomeration, localisation economies, regional path dependence, specialisation, industrial districts and clusters. The success of cases such as Silicon Valley and Third Italy are cited as key examples of how regions can utilise their competitive and comparative advantages to achieve economic robustness (Jones and MacLeod, 2004).

‘New regionalism’ has succeeded in elevating the region as “moments in spaces of flows [and] relational places entangled in webs of connections” (Smith, 2004: 9), but also a “functional space” (Deas, 2000) for negotiating both supra-national and local economic, social and environmental processes and relates well with the regional planning agenda as it emphasises the exploits of the

unique social-economic, spatial, environmental and technological condition of a given region (Haughton and Counsell, 2004).

The 'new regionalist' approach *puts institutions at the centre of stimulating economic growth*. The importance of 'institutional thickness' in successful regions (Amin and Thrift, 1995), as Cooke and Morgan (1993, 1994) observe, provides an interpretation of the manner and level at which intra and inter-organisational networking can provide a platform for robust innovation networks. Thus, there is an appreciation of what Storper (1997) referred to as the "untraded interdependencies" – these are the 'soft infrastructure' issues such as social capital, customs and values defining a particular region. 'New regionalism' has been linked to the rise of the knowledge economy – resulting in the explosion of literature on learning regions and innovative regions (Jones and Ward, 2004).

There is much emphasis on the formation of 'regional identities' and interests within the 'new regionalist' approach (Tewdwr-Jones, 2002). Regional cultural determinism and articulation, when properly harnessed, can result in the binding and cementing of relationships between firms and individuals – leading to competitiveness (Hague, 2005; Tewdwr-Jones, 2002).

The body of literature that acknowledges the interconnectivity between competitiveness, socio-territorial cohesion and regional planning (Haughton and Counsell, 2004: 137) assert that "fortunes of regional strategic planning and regional economic development have become mutually entwined". What is critical for planners, economic geographers and others interested in regional planning is the formulation of regional plans that are strategic and credible. For a region to rise, conditions must be favourable. As the new regionalists would say, a good regional plan must take cognisance of the economic and non-economic, hard and soft infrastructure.

Surely, a regional plan that is "too tentative, bland in content, weak on strategic content [and] lacking spatial direction" (Haughton and Counsell, 2004: 138) is likely to impede regional competitiveness and robustness. *Sustainability* becomes the thread that binds regional planning and regional economic development together. With the proliferation of literature on sustainability science; a discipline that views cities and regions as 'living, complex and interdependent ecological systems' – regional plans must be formulated, reviewed and implemented with this thinking as a foundation.

Being strategic involves taking calculated risks. A sound regional plan must distinguish between macro and micro-strategies and/or models and "... should be a composition of several sets of alternative solutions, giving a number of choices in objectives, strategies and means of implementation. Regional planning should be first of all a method of imaginative and rational thinking about the regional dimension in the development of a given society. So, the mono-alternative, detailed and static approach should be replaced by a multi-alternative dynamic approach which would penetrate deeply into the general political, economic, social and cultural discussions in the given country" (Kuklinski, 1970: 274).

Informed and influenced by the work of Friedmann (1968), Kuklinski (1970), Nir (1990), Cooke and Morgan (1993, 1994), Amin and Thrift (1995), Storper (1997), Deas, (2000), Perrons (2001), Tewdwr-Jones (2002), Jones and Ward (2004), Haughton and Counsell (2004), Hague (2005) on regional planning and drawing on some of the new thinking emerging from 'new regionalism', the authors have identified the following salient features of a sound strategic regional plan.

A strategic regional plan should:

- demonstrate an understanding of functional regions, economic linkages and polycentricity;
- have a strong economic focus and incorporate a robust understating of competitive and comparative advantage;
- proceed from an empirically rigorous analysis of potential, opportunities, challenges and problems facing the region;
- formulate clear priorities and objectives for the spatial development of the region;
- develop a clear spatial rationale which is sufficiently clear to assist stakeholders and role-players in spatially targeting and focusing their programmes, projects and investments in the region;
- provide a long-term vision or framework for the future and contain principles to guide development along a desired path or development trajectory;
- reflect an understanding of the region as a complex social-ecological system;
- understand and make sense of the region as relational place entangled in a web of spatial and non-spatial networks and connections;
- acknowledge and build on the institutional dimensions which underpin co-operative advantage and optimise the benefits of untraded interdependencies to develop and harness regional identity.

## **Provincial growth and development strategies in the context of the South African intergovernmental planning system**

Clark *et al.*, (2007) recognise the importance of coordinated and planned action at the level below the nation where there is a clear geographical space in which there are economic, social and environmental dynamics playing out. This section of the paper focuses on the PGDSs prepared by the sub-national (provincial) sphere within the South African intergovernmental planning system and highlights elements of the unfolding policy framework, which starts to point to the emergence of a regional development paradigm as the foundation of strategic territorial planning in South Africa.

### **Overview of the South African intergovernmental planning system**

The celebration of the rise and/or the renaissance of the region in places like the United Kingdom and the Nordic countries in the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Tewdwr-Jones, 2002) coincided with the formulation of an integrated development planning system<sup>1</sup> entrenched in a system of government which comprises a unitary state with a decentralisation of powers and functions across three spheres (national, provincial and local) which are “distinctive, yet inter-related and inter-dependent” (South Africa, 1996). This intergovernmental system did not evolve out of socio-economic considerations, but “is the outcome of historical factors and a negotiated political settlement in the early 1990s” (Robinson, 2008). This newly founded developmental state has grappled with various approaches, systems and instruments during much of the last 14 years of South Africa’s transition to a successful democracy.

As part of its ongoing transformation process the state has introduced an intergovernmental system of integrated planning comprising a range of planning instruments aimed at ensuring that

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<sup>1</sup> Development planning has been defined as “a participatory approach to integrate economic, sectoral, spatial, social, institutional, environmental and fiscal strategies in order to support the optimal allocation of scarce resources between sectors and geographical areas and across the population in a manner that provides sustainable growth, equity and the empowerment of the poor and the marginalized” (FEPD, 1995, emphasis added).

intergovernmental priority setting; resource allocation; implementation; and monitoring and evaluation to achieve sustainable development and service delivery.

The key instruments which constitute this system include:

- the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) and the National Spatial Development Perspective (NSDP) as indicative and normative planning instruments within the national sphere.
- the Provincial Growth and Development Strategies (PGDSs), supported by Provincial Spatial Development Frameworks (PSDFs) in the provincial sphere; and
- the municipal Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) which includes Spatial Development Frameworks (SDFs) in the local sphere.

The May 2004 Cabinet Lekgotla and the President's State of the Nation Addresses in 2004 and 2005 stressed the need to complete the process of harmonising the Provincial Growth and Development Strategies (PGDSs), the municipal Integrated Development Plans (IDPs), and the National Spatial Development Perspective (NSDP). The president referred to the piloting of NSDP-PGDS-IDP alignment in 13 districts and metros in his State of the Nation Address (9 February 2005, p10) and indicated that the project will be testing ways and means of achieving rigorous analysis and shared understanding of the regional space economies of these pilot districts.

In December 2004 the Policy Coordination and Advisory Services (PCAS) Unit completed a consultative process and report proposing a number of strategic interventions to achieve the alignment based on the NSDP-platform. The report *Harmonisation and Alignment of IDPs, PGDSs and the NSDP* (Presidency and dplg, 2004) was presented to Cabinet in February 2005 with a set of recommendations on practical steps going forward, which included the notion the NSDP should serve as the 'common platform' which provides a perspective for rational decision making on infrastructure investment and development spending, which aims to fundamentally shape the space-economy over the longer term.

A number of provinces prepared Provincial Growth and Development Strategies from as early as 1996, in accordance with their powers to do so in terms of the 1996 Constitution. These PGDSs were, however, often located in provincial sector departments and this resulted in other provincial sector departments and national line departments not acknowledging or using them. The Harmonisation and Alignment Report (Presidency and dplg, 2004) identified PGDSs and District and Metropolitan IDPs as the most strategic instruments to achieve greater alignment and harmonisation with the NSDP and provides for PGDSs to be prepared by the Premier's Offices in the various provinces. A PGDS should in summary, provide 1) an overview of the province's development needs, potential and objectives, broken down to impact zone-level; 2) the province's proposed economic growth trajectory; 3) the sectors of comparative advantage in which the province plans to invest; and 4) the development proposals for each of the impact zones in the province. The PGDSs are prepared within the framework provided by 1) the national development objectives (as captured in the MTSF); 2) the contents of sector and national and provincial departments strategic plans; 3) the principles and guidelines as captured in the legal and policy framework and the NSDP; and 4) the priorities and resource and support requirements outlined in IDPs.

Provincial Spatial Development Frameworks are invaluable in the preparation of the PGDSs and provincial sector and departmental strategic plans in that they provide a spatial frame of reference for 1) debating and considering the implications of investment options; 2) forging coherence and

alignment in the spatial location of investment in the province; and 3) providing a record and visual presentation of these decisions.

Formal guidelines for the preparation of PGDSs were only produced during 2005<sup>2</sup>. The PGDS Guidelines (2005) describe the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy (PGDS) as “a critical tool to guide and coordinate the allocation of national, provincial and local resources and private sector investment to achieve sustainable development outcomes” and views the PGDS as a strategic statement and not a vehicle for reflecting the administrative role of provinces. They propound that the “cornerstone of an effective PGDS is a deep and thorough understanding of provincial endowments and assets, development potential (as defined in the NSDP) and constraints, along with the forces shaping these and how they are changing over time. These should be spatially referenced, with the trend information being specifically important ... and should inform the difficult choices around resource allocation, usage and trade-offs (in the interests of maximising developmental impact)”.

Whilst the current provincial fiscal architecture affirms provinces main responsibility as national’s social service delivery agent in respect of education, health and housing, Robinson (2008) argues that a broader interpretation of Schedule 4 of the Constitution (South Africa, 1996) includes a “meso-macro policy link between provincial growth and development strategies to the overarching marco-economic policy framework at the national level, and to the more detailed local economic development plans at the municipal level”. In the *Framework for Contextualising and Applying the NSDP* (Mohammed, 2006), the Policy Unit in the Presidency reiterates that: development occurs in geographic space: “Hence our ability as a country to accelerate growth and reduce unemployment and poverty is principally tied to the growth potential of different areas and regions”. According to the NSDP (The Presidency, 2006b), “developing a coherent understanding of regional economic development and territorial patterns of economic development, social exclusion and resource use is of paramount importance in achieving our objectives”.

The NSDP proceeds on the following four assumptions:

- Dynamic qualities of areas are developed historically and culturally over a long period of time.
- In no country in the world is social and economic development and potential evenly distributed.
- Different regions have different economic potentials and the spatial variations in the incidence of poverty are also vastly different.
- Diverse and disparate spatial contexts suggests a policy approach which itself should be differentiated and conducive to the requirements of the different contexts.

Mohamed (2006) conceptualises a region as comprising a wider set of economic connections and institutional obligations and recognises that regions can be defined in a way that may embody a number of districts and metros such as in the case of the Gauteng Global City Region, which implies that a PGDS has an important role in functionally linking and integrating districts/metros to enhance the competitiveness and development impact of the wider global city region.

While the ‘resurgence of the region’ has been celebrated in the developed world, South Africa and its developing counterparts are only beginning to grapple with the subtleties of regional development. The paper now moves on to assess the extent to which PGDSs are incorporating this thinking in their approach to regional planning as they grapple with formulating strategic plans that can address the

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<sup>2</sup>These guidelines enabled the development of a coherent analytical framework which facilitated a series of systematic assessments of the evolution of the nine PGDSs over a three-year period. The authors will draw on these assessments in the last section of the report to assess the extent to which PGDSs are starting to reflect the salient features of strategic regional plans.



subtleties of regional development challenges. This is being done in a context of highly disparate development realities, a dual economy, spatial fragmentation, rising unemployment rate and other related development challenges. There is growing concern around the nature, relevance and role of provinces in promoting regional development planning. This concern has resulted in the policy-review process targeted at re-evaluating the role of provinces in the light of pressing developmental challenges resulting from local and global dynamics. South Africa is now compelled to review not only its developmental path, but also the very texture and structure of its institutional arrangements required to realise its growth and development aspirations.

## **How are the PGDSs measuring up?**

This section of the paper reflects briefly on the extent to which the PGDSs are drawing on emerging thinking in 'new regionalism' to distil a regional development planning agenda in South Africa. It is acknowledged in the previous section that policy is beginning to be characterised by some elements of 'new regionalist' thinking and that a stronger regional development paradigm underpins the policy on intergovernmental planning, but is this approach and thinking filtering through to provincial strategic planning processes and becoming evident in the PGDSs?

The findings reflected here are the product of an ongoing process of assessment and engagement with provinces around PGDSs and PSDFs. It was spearheaded by the Policy Coordination and Advisory Services (PCAS) Unit in the Presidency in 2005 and conducted by the authors over the past three years. The broader objectives of the PGDS assessments were to:

- Support provinces to develop and effectively utilise the PGDS as a strategic instrument to direct and facilitate provincial development.
- Improve intergovernmental alignment and guide activities of various role players and agencies involved in integrated planning across spheres and sectors in the achievement of common goals and objectives.
- Create a platform for knowledge-sharing and learning on provincial strategic planning.

Each round of PGDS assessment has had a slightly different focus but in their entirety they provide a good basis from which to reflect on the effectiveness of PGDSs as strategic regional plans for the purpose of this paper.

## **Are the salient features of strategic regional plans evident?**

As an overall observation, the shift in mindset from 'old regionalism' to 'new regionalism' as characterised by Wallis (2002) does appear to have been made in the South African planning discourse. The PGDSs (as well as the strategic plans of other spheres of government) are generally characterised by many of the 'new regionalist' concepts such as 'governance', 'process', 'openness', 'collaboration', 'trust', 'empowerment' and 'networks'. However, although these buzzwords are evident, one needs to explore at a content level, based on empirical findings, the extent to which each of the salient features of a sound strategic regional plan (highlighted in Section 2) are evident in the PGDSs<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> For a full sense of the detailed findings of this work see Presidency report entitled *National Progress Report on the State of Provincial Growth and Development Strategies (PGDSs)/ Provincial Spatial Frameworks (PSDFs in South Africa* (September 2007), prepared by Cathy Meiklejohn, CSIR. A further update is also in the process of being completed and will be available by November 2008.

## **Understanding of functional regions, economic linkages and polycentricity**

Generally the way in which the region is defined within PGDSs is as the provincial administrative region. Insufficient consideration is given to the possibility that functional regions (whether defined in economic, social or ecological terms) often span and are nested within provincial and municipal administrative boundaries. The Gauteng Spatial Development Perspective (Gauteng Department of Economic Development, 2007) and Mpumalanga Integrated Spatial Framework (Mpumalanga Province, 2007) are possible exceptions in that they look beyond provincial boundaries and explore functional linkages that exist beyond the province and within regions in the province. The spatial analysis in the Gauteng Spatial Development Perspective (GSDP) (Gauteng Department of Economic Development, 2007), for example, comes up with a polycentric distribution of economic sectors and identifies flows and interaction between different nodes. It also includes useful work on flows between poverty concentrations and economic activity areas. The OECD territorial review work which focuses on analysing the development of functional regions around particular growth nodes has also gained credence, particularly in the Western Cape, where such a territorial review process is underway.

In some of the PGDSs 'sub-regions' within the province are explored, for example in the Free State PGDS (Free State Province, 2007) where three levels of analysis are employed (District, Local Municipality and Settlement), but they are often defined in terms of district and/or local municipal boundaries and do not exploit the functional region concept fully. The Limpopo PGDS is a notable exception in this regard in that it bases its strategy on an economic cluster analysis and therefore provides a good indication of functional regions for the different economic clusters. The functional region concept is also implicit within the typology of settlement clusters that are defined in the Limpopo Spatial Development Framework (Limpopo Province, 2007).

There is a limited or non-existent understanding in PGDSs of regions not as tightly bound spaces but as porous territorial formations whose notional boundaries are straddled by a broad range of network connections (Amin, 2002 and Allen *et al.*, 1998). Thus the PGDS review found that there was an absence of inter-provincial planning and that the analysis were generally static and inward-focused and did not develop a clear understanding of functional economic regions (within and beyond provinces) and the flows and linkages between them.

## **Strong economic focus incorporating a robust understating of competitive and comparative advantage**

The importance of understanding the space economy has generally been taken on board in provincial planning, particularly since the NSDP has risen in prominence over the past few years. In the Presidency PGDS assessment (2007) most provincial PGDS champions, were of the opinion, for example, that they have had moderate to significant success in the process of defining, measuring and mapping economic potential and comparative and competitive advantage. Limpopo stands out as having developed a clear understanding of provincial competitive and comparative advantage based on its economic cluster analysis. North West's SDF (North West Province, 2004) also incorporates development zones and a nodal strategy focusing on the province's comparative advantages. Other provinces are progressively becoming clearer on what their competitive and comparative advantages are but much of this is still based on a rather weak understanding of national and global economic trends and dynamics with respect to specific economic sectors and little scenario planning which explores different scenarios taking into account different macro and micro trends.

### **Proceed from an empirically rigorous analysis of potential, opportunities, challenges and problems facing the region**

The analytical basis of most PGDSs has been significantly strengthened in the past three years, particularly the spatial analysis. Whereas many provinces relied initially only on 2001 census statistics from Stats SA they have begun to strengthen their evidence-base and have often contracted service providers to ensure that their empirical analysis is more rigorous. They have begun to locate specific potentials and challenges in space which provides a better basis for targeting their strategies on specific places within the provinces. Most of the provinces are of the view that they have had moderate to significant success in the process of defining, measuring and mapping potential, opportunities and challenges and thus feel that their analytical basis for assessing strategic options is fairly strong. Based on the PGDS assessment, however, it is clear that there are still some challenges in this regard in many provinces. There is a danger of assuming that the analytical base is sufficiently strong and beginning to focus on other challenges in the PGDS process when there are still some important weak points in the analysis that, if they are not addressed, will ultimately weaken the impact of the strategy. Some of the remaining analysis weaknesses include:

- Regional analysis, including flows and linkages and refined understanding of the potential at district and inter-district level;
- Environmental and ecological analysis applying sustainability thinking (with the possible exception of the Western Cape where this has been addressed);
- Conducting future and trends analysis; and
- Formulating and weighing up alternative strategies to achieve objectives, including the use of scenario planning.

### **Have formulated clear priorities and objectives for the spatial development of the region?**

Generally as a result of the improvement in spatial analysis in most PGDSs/PSDFs a clearer basis for spatial priorities and strategies has been laid. The Western Cape probably provides the best example of the essence of the detailed and rigorous spatial analysis and strategising in SDF being distilled into the PGDS. They characterise the provincial space economy into four significant spatial components which are key areas for economic and growth opportunities. The PSDF (Western Cape Province, 2005) develops the detail of the rationale for focusing infrastructure investment on certain spatial areas and the iKapa Elihlumayo White Paper (Western Cape, 2008) simply provides a summary of this strategy. The SDF, which provides details in terms of the type and location of infrastructure investment and specific spatial strategies for respective districts, is also being approved as a Structure Plan in terms of Section 4(6) of LUPO, giving it statutory powers. In the Eastern Cape PGDS nine pilot projects are being used in an attempt to integrate planning and resource allocation focused in nodes and corridors of development (Eastern Cape Province, 2004). In the work around the Free State Spatial Development Framework (Free State Province, 2007) some quite detailed work has been done at district level on identifying different types of Centres, NSDP Nodes, Hubs and Corridors, tourism routes and transport axes as well as broader economic zones. These help to provide spatial differentiation in the provincial strategies.

It is, however, worth highlighting that although spatial analysis has generally improved in PGDSs, there is still a lot of room for improvement in the way the spatial strategies are presented. Maps used in many of the PGDSs are poor, too small and not user-friendly. This is a small technical issue that can make a significant difference in whether the spatial analysis and strategies are presented in a manner that can usefully guide decision makers.

## **Is there a clear spatial rationale to assist role players in spatially targeting their programmes and investments in the region?**

The 2007 PGDS assessment (The Presidency, 2007) found that although progress had been made towards devising a clearer spatial rationale within PGDSs there is still a noticeable weakness in achieving a shared understanding as the basis for coordinated multi-stakeholder decision making, investment and action in the provinces. This could, in part, be a process challenge of not including the relevant stakeholders sufficiently at key points in the strategic planning process. Thus the opportunity of achieving a shared understanding and getting their buy-in to the spatial rationale to the extent that it guides the spatial location of their programme implementation and investment decisions. The weakness mentioned earlier about the poor visual presentation of spatial analysis and strategies probably also hampers the efficacy of the spatial rationale in guiding decisions of the relevant role players at a very practical level.

Two provinces where some of these process and presentation challenges have been overcome are Limpopo and Western Cape. In Limpopo, sectoral summits were held and the private sector was involved in numerous workshops in the PGDS formulation process. Seven industrial cluster committees were set up and a PGDS Advisory Council and Premier's Round Table discussions played an important role in providing a forum for input from key role-players. This has been an ongoing process and they have now also planned an Infrastructure Indaba for 2008/09 to facilitate the process of national-local-provincial alignment. In the Western Cape all social partners, including sector departments, first gave their approval to a PGDS framework document. Different departments or clusters were then made responsible for various base strategies that were formulated in line with the framework agreement and fed into the PGDS. By taking the PGDS through the legislative route into a White Paper, sector department compliance is further ensured in the Western Cape (Western Cape Province, 2008).

## **Provide a long-term vision and contain principles to guide the provinces' development trajectory**

Most of the PGDSs claim to be a 10-year strategy and some of them include some targets that look beyond 2010 but generally the content of the PGDSs focuses on meeting the shorter term challenges that face the provinces rather than on long-term strategising. This is probably not unexpected in a political context where it is very unusual for politicians to think beyond their current term of office. A particular challenge around future and trends analysis was highlighted in the 2007 PGDS Assessment (The Presidency, 2007) and this also mitigates against a long-term view being taken in the PGDSs. The Vision statements in most PGDSs are vague and could apply to any other province. For example, 'Building a prosperous, sustainable growing provincial economy to reduce poverty and improve social development'<sup>4</sup>. Clearly such a Vision statement does not really capture the unique and dynamic vision for a particular province in a way that can really mobilise stakeholders around specific long-term strategies.

There are in most PGDSs clear development principles laid out which should guide the provinces along a desired development trajectory. These can potentially be used to provide a helpful long-term framework in the context of short-term political flux and instability. For example, the Northern Cape PGDS (Northern Cape Province, 2005) sets out and describes the six guiding principles of 'Equality, Efficiency, Integration, Good Governance, Sustainability and Batho Pele'. It is hoped that such

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<sup>4</sup> Northern Cape Vision Statement from its 2005 PGDS (p. 7)

development principles would not change with political change and would continue to be used as a yardstick for measuring the appropriateness of any proposed provincial strategy.

### **Understanding of the region as a complex social-ecological system**

Analysis of regions as complex socio-ecological systems (Nir, 1990) and a more ecological approach to attaining sustainability and understanding integrated systems (Pezzoli, 1997 and Pezzoli *et al.*, 2001) is generally weak. Some of the right concepts are used in many PGDSs and there does appear to be a growing awareness around the need to incorporate sustainability considerations. There are a few cases in which there has been some uptake of elements of sustainability science thinking, but this has not really taken root in national policy (although some of the right words are used) and is very limited in its depth of understanding.

It is probably accurate to say that there is not one PGDS which has managed to fully encapsulate a systemic view of sustainability which adequately addresses the interactions and relationships between economy, ecology and society.

Four of the nine provinces claim to have significant success in mainstreaming sustainability considerations in their PGDSs and the remaining five recognise that they have had moderate to limited success in doing so. Even this seems to paint a fairly rosy picture and may be based on an incomplete understanding of all the implications of truly mainstreaming sustainability. There are, however, one or two examples of some advances being made in this respect: The Western Cape SDF (Western Cape Province, 2005) has made significant strides to mainstreaming sustainability considerations and also explores in some detail the impact of climate change on the province. North West province was in the process of developing a Sustainable Development Indicator Framework which aims to assist with monitoring progress towards achieving sustainable growth and development in the province.

### **Region seen as a relational place entangled in a web of spatial and non-spatial networks and connections**

Few provinces have actually managed to identify and analyse linkages and flows of people, resources and information within and beyond their borders. Thus the 'new regionalist' concept of regions as relational places entangled in webs of connections (Smith, 2004: 9) has not been grappled with. Tools for understanding these network relations and interaction have not been fully explored and/or are underdeveloped (Batty, 2003). The overlapping and shifting delineations of functional regions for different dimensions of development, for example, demographic, economic, social networks, ecological, technological/knowledge, etc. have not been explored in PGDSs<sup>5</sup>.

Some provincial strategic documents (for example, Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Western Cape, Free State and Northern Cape) have begun to address migration dynamics which obviously impact significantly on their service-delivery challenges as well as on economic strategy among other things. However, the tools for quantifying migration flows of people between settlements, municipalities, provinces and countries (both daily commuting and longer term migration which include illegal immigration, refugees, circular migration, stepwise migration and legal immigration) are very poorly developed. Deducing the specific strategic implications of these flows of people remains a huge challenge in all PGDSs.

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<sup>5</sup> This has been tackled in the EU HyperAtlas which provides a useful approach to planning for overlapping regions.

Provincial strategic planners have not really even begun to see the region as the 'functional space' (Deas, 2000) for negotiating both supra-national and local economic, social and environmental processes. As Massey (1984) put it, regional development is a set of relational processes, as an interdependent process, it is the "dynamic outcome of the complex interaction between territorialised relational networks and global production networks within the context of regional governance structures" (Coe *et al.*, 2004: 469). Thus the regional planning process cannot focus only on inherent regional advantages or only on rigid configurations of globalisation processes. It needs to consider both and this is a particular weakness of all PGDSs.

### **Are 'softer' institutional and regional identity issues addressed?**

There is a virtual absence of acknowledging and building on the institutional dimensions which underpin regional development. Thus concepts such as 'cooperative' advantage (Cooke, 1999) and optimising the benefits of untraded interdependencies are absent in the PGDSs. Even at a more obvious level of analysing skills levels of the workforce and assessing the match to economic sectors being promoted the PGDSs are quite weak. This has been addressed to some extent in the Limpopo PGDS (Limpopo, 2004) where key strategies around setting up Academies to address specific skills gaps are prominent and are featuring in the relevant departmental budgets and State of the Province Addresses. In many other PGDSs the skills mismatch is mentioned at a very broad level but there is insufficient analysis of the existing skills levels and/or of the skills needs of specific economic sectors to back up a clear strategy.

There is very little attention focused on harnessing regional identity and using the Vision in the PGDS to get broad stakeholder and citizen buy-in around promoting a specific regional identity as a means for promoting regional growth and development. Few provinces have used the PGDS process as a means to get real strategic engagement around the concept of regional identity and how this can be used to encourage buy-in to, and implementation of, the provincial strategy.

The strong institutional focus in 'new regionalism' which was discussed in the second section of this paper has not come through strongly in the analysis and strategies of PGDSs (although they have been mentioned on occasion by national policy makers). The 'soft infrastructure' issues such as social capital, customs and values defining a particular region – are not taken into account in the regional planning discourse. Cooke's (1999) 'cooperative' advantage concept and the possibility of maximising this and developing links beyond provincial boundaries have also not been taken on board in any PGDSs.

### **Conclusion**

It has been argued here that a regional development paradigm can add value, not only in terms of provincial strategic planning, but also in contributing to a more effective intergovernmental planning system to set South Africa on its desired trajectory of sustainable and shared growth and development. It was found that provincial strategic planning processes, specifically reflected in PGDSs, are beginning to assimilate elements of 'new regionalism' and to work in terms of the regional development paradigm which is emerging in national policy thinking. From the assessments of PGDSs it is also clear, however, that many provinces still face significant challenges in incorporating this thinking (and using its related analytical and strategic tools) in order to maximise its potential value in their strategic planning processes, as well as broader intergovernmental planning processes.

It is important to recognise that not only is this thinking still underdeveloped and often a bit fuzzy within South African policy<sup>6</sup>, but also that the capacity for sophisticated regional planning as envisaged here is weak in many provinces. This mismatch between sophisticated approaches and tools and the capacity available to employ the approaches and tools could bolster the argument for a national planning agency or regional development agency/ies (or some alternative resource/support institution) which can assist or support provincial planners in undertaking some of these more sophisticated approaches which can add significant value and impact in terms of the effectiveness of regional planning.

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<sup>6</sup> There is still, after all, debate around what a region is in South Africa, that is, how to define a region and regional planning in this context. The dplg review of provincial and local government is currently grappling with some of these issues and decisions around the future role and definition of local and provincial government.

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